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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 026143

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2018
TAGS: PREL AMGT ODIP OFDP BO
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR AMBASSADOR RECALL

REF: A. A) MINSK 163
 1B. B) MINSK 168
 1C. C) STEWART-KRAMER EMAIL 3/11/08

Classified By: Deputy Assistant Secretary David Kramer
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (U) This is the Department's response to Ref A. Embassy Minsk sought guidance on the request from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) that the U.S. recall Ambassador Stewart for consultations in Washington; that the U.S. reduce the number of U.S. diplomatic staff at the embassy in keeping with the size of Belarusian diplomatic staff in the United States; and that certain restrictions be imposed on the activities and travel of U.S. Embassy personnel. This cable also provides guidance on additional points raised in Refs A and B.

Recall of Ambassadors for Consultations

12. (C) The Department has recalled Ambassador Stewart to Washington for consultations in response to notification by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on March 11 that the Government of Belarus (GoB) would declare Ambassador Stewart persona non grata if she did not depart for consultations within 24 hours (Ref C).

Size of Mission Staff

13. (C) The Department is concerned by the GoB request that Embassy Minsk voluntarily reduce the number of U.S. diplomatic and technical staff. Embassy is instructed to ensure staff continues to perform their normal duties pending further guidance. The Department acknowledges the possibility that Belarus may order additional departures or prevent future arrivals, and will provide subsequent guidance as needed.

14. (C) The Department wishes to engage in a dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus to clarify aspects of its request to reduce the size of staff at Embassy Minsk to the level of Belarusian diplomatic staff in the United States. The Department prefers to keep this dialogue with the MFA in Minsk rather than through informal channels of the Presidential Administration. If Belarus were to take unilateral action to reduce the number of U.S. staff, the Department would impose reciprocal measures.

-- As of March 11, there were 14 Belarusian diplomatic personnel, 6 Admin and Technical staff, and 21 dependents in the United States.

-- Our mission in Belarus has 35 diplomatic personnel, 0 Admin and Technical staff, and 18 Eligible Family Members.

15. (U) Embassy Minsk is instructed to deliver the following points verbally to the MFA at the appropriate level and to include the points in the body of a Diplomatic Note to be presented to the MFA on March 13, 2008:

16. (U) Begin points:

-- The Department of State has considered Diplomatic Note number 12-06/4762-N and has the honor to make the following reply:

-- The Department notes that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus has recalled Ambassador Mikhail Khvostov for consultations. The Department of State wishes to stress that the decision to recall Ambassador Khvostov was taken by the Government of Belarus and the United States would welcome his return to his duties.

-- The Department notes that the Government of Belarus has suggested that the Department of State recall Ambassador Karen Stewart for consultations in Washington. The Department decided that this would be an appropriate time for her to return to the United States for consultations

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since the Ministry of Foreign affairs informed her she would be declared persona non grata if she did not leave Minsk within 24 hours. We expect that her consultations will last no longer than three weeks, upon which time we expect that she will return to Minsk.

-- The Department has taken note of the Ministry's suggestion that it reduce the size of the U.S. citizen staff in Minsk to equal the size of the Belarusian diplomatic staff in the United States.

-- Such a request is highly unusual and is not based upon the standard in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Indeed, U.S. missions overseas are often significantly larger than the receiving State's mission in the United States.

-- The Vienna Convention does provide, at Article 11, that the receiving State may require that the size of the mission be kept within limits considered by it to be reasonable and normal, having regard to the circumstances and conditions in the receiving State and to the needs of the particular mission.⁸

-- We would like to discuss with the Ministry the reason for its request to reduce the size of our mission, and, in particular, the circumstances and conditions that have precipitated this request.

-- We would also appreciate the opportunity to explain to the Ministry the needs of our mission. The Department believes the Embassy's current staffing is necessary to ensure an adequate and appropriate level of representation and security.

-- The Department also would like to clarify the reason for requesting that U.S. Embassy diplomatic personnel coordinate contacts with Belarus organs of government, institutions, and enterprises, and travel to other regions through the Ministry. The Department notes that there are no similar requirements imposed on Belarus diplomats accredited to the United States.

-- If the Government of Belarus insists on imposing such new requirements, the United States will consider imposing

similar restrictions on a reciprocal basis.

End points.

7.(U) Embassy Minsk's efforts and assistance are greatly appreciated during this difficult time. Point of Contact in the Department for questions and follow-up is Stephen Gee, Desk Officer for Belarus in the Office of Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus Affairs, 202-736-4443, or geesj@state.sgov.gov.

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